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Office Memorandum • UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

TO : The Director

DATE: 27 October 1961

NSC REVIEWED 16 MAY 2007 NO OBJECTION TO DECLASSIFICATION AND

FROM : Assistant Director, National Estimates

SUBJECT: Attached Memorandum

The attached memorandum was written in response to NATIONAL SECURITY ACTION MEMORANDUM NO. 105 on "Policy Toward Egypt and Syria". We recommend that it be distributed to the Members of USIB for information and to Mr. McGeorge Bundy, who has expressed an interest in it. A copy should also go to the Assistant Secretary for Middle East Affairs, Department of State.

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cc: DDCI
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for SHERMAN KENT

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

27 October 1961

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: Implications of the Dissolution of the UAR

1. Syria's breakaway from Egypt has dealt a heavy blow to Nasser's prestige and leadership and has sharply increased the instability of the Arab world. It has also discredited the formula, represented by the UAR, of achieving Arab unity by the surrender of one state's sovereignty to another. The dissolution of the UAR has not, however, changed the underlying needs and conditions which give rise to Arab Nationalism, nor the goals for which Nasser has long been the most prominent spokesman. These will continue to receive the support of most politically conscious Arabs. Most important of these goals are collaboration for the achievement of common purposes and the pursuit of a foreign policy of "positive neutralism" or nonalignment. It also remains likely that Egypt and Nasser, if he remains President, will continue to play a key role in area affairs which will determine the prospects for area solidarity and the direction in which its force will be turned.

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2. Popular Arab Reactions. In the Arab world at large the myth of Nasser's infallibility has been dispelled. His position as the chief spokesman of Arab unity has, however, been to a considerable degree salvaged by the manner in which he forbore a clash of arms with the Syrian Army and proclaimed his continued devotion to Arab unity based on the will of the Arab people. Many Arabs probably accept his explanation of events in Syria as the work of reactionary enemies of the Arab Nationalist revolution and of unity who acted with the assistance of sinister outside forces. Arabs generally and particularly West Bank Jordanians have regretted Nasser's defeat in Syria because they fear it will weaken Arab capabilities against Israel. King Hussein's hasty recognition of the Syrian revolutionaries and his renewed attack on Nasser, accompanying as they did his blatant rigging of the elections, has built up feeling in Jordan against Hussein and in favor of Nasser and the policies he has represented.

3. Reactions of Arab Leaders. The chiefs of other Arab states are likely to seek to take advantage in various ways of the decline of Nasser's position. They will push the trend to solidarity and cooperation rather than unity among the Arab states that has been apparent for some time. Kassem of Iraq and Hussein of Jordan

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will seek further to reduce Egypt's dominant role in the Arab League and to make the League function as an association of equal sovereign states --other members of the Arab League are likely to cooperate in this effort to some degree. Consideration will probably be given to the idea of providing a counterpoise to Egypt by implementing the Fertile Crescent idea. It is unlikely, however, that Iraq and Jordan could reach agreement on such a move or that Syria, having just freed itself from Egypt, would accept anything more than a loose association.

4. Nasser's Position in Egypt. In Egypt the breakup of the UAR has given voice to the many elements of the population which are dissatisfied with life under Nasser. The President has further stimulated dissatisfaction by his decision to strike quickly at the "reactionaries" in the business community and in the army whom he identifies with the group which carried off the coup in Syria, whom he believes to be responsible for the failures of his revolutionary program in Egypt, and whom he regards as the most likely source of action against him in Egypt. The large majority of the politically conscious public, however, is unaffected by these blows at the rich and the privileged. Though they have plenty of reasons for dissatisfaction they probably still believe Nasser has their interests at heart and is Egypt's best leader.

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5. The key members of the government probably remain loyal. Recent cabinet changes have not put out of office anyone likely or able to lead an opposition movement. The old henchmen whose loyalty dates back before the revolution -- Ali Sabri, Abdel Latif el Boghdady, Zacharia Muhieddin, and Abdel Hakim Amer, despite his failure in Syria -- are still in key positions. None appears to be an aspirant to the Presidency, though one of them would probably step forward if Nasser were to disappear. The technicians in the cabinet are generally able men who are unlikely to work against the President. There is no indication that any civilian group or combination of groups has any significant capability for action against the regime, even in the present situation.

6. The most likely source of any action to overthrow Nasser is the group of army officers who have personally suffered or whose families have suffered from Nasser's socialist economic decrees of July of this year or from the arrests and confiscations of property since the Syrian coup. It is unlikely that any group of officers could persuade the army as a whole to support it in a move against Nasser, and elements of the armed forces would probably oppose it. Nasser is aware of the danger in the army and is taking every precaution to block such action. That some group, unknown to

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Nasser or to us, might succeed in striking a blow against him is a possibility but seems unlikely. Any army group which succeeded in overthrowing Nasser, even if it started out with a conservative policy, would almost certainly feel forced to move soon to adopt Nasser's main policies and would soon yield to more extremist influences. It would probably also be less successful than Nasser in maintaining its independence of the Soviet Bloc.

7. Impact on Nasser's Foreign Policy. Whether Nasser will continue to act with restraint in the aftermath of the Syrian coup is not yet clear. He himself has probably not yet made up his mind. His own personal and emotional reaction to events will be of great importance. If he feels that the Kuzbari regime is collaborating with other Arab regimes against him, he is likely to throw all available resources into a subversive effort against them regardless of the risks involved. If he believes that the US or the other Western powers are using the situation to bring about his downfall, he is likely to launch an anti-American campaign and seek ways of causing difficulties for the West in Africa, the UN, and elsewhere.

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8. If, however, other Arab governments and the Western governments do not rub salt in his wounds, and if they recognize Egypt's continuing importance in the community of Arab states, there is a better than even chance that Nasser will devote his main energies to his many problems at home and look for an evolutionary development of unity among the Arab states. So far we have been impressed by his avoidance of easy propaganda attacks on the West by way of explaining his defeat in Syria. This gives us reason to believe that he will accommodate to good relations between the US and Syria so long as they do not appear to be part of a maneuver to destroy him. A gesture by the US indicating its acknowledgement of the importance of Egypt's and Nasser's continuing role in the area would have great influence on Nasser's self-confidence and his behavior. During the next few months the political and moral implications of such a gesture will be more important than economic aid. Nasser will certainly not cease working for Pan-Arab goals or give up his championship of the policy of "positive neutralism."

9. Syrian Prospects. Now that the union with Egypt has been broken, Syria is likely to continue its independent national existence for a long time to come. However, the political and social fragmentation which has long stood in the way of effective self-government in

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Syria has not been swept away by the upsurge of enthusiasm for independence from the UAR. The regime in Syria is unlikely long to remain in power in its present form. Though it stands upon the credit acquired by achieving independence, its unrepresentative character and its vulnerability to charges of conservatism, association with the moneyed upper class, and sympathy with the Western "imperialists" limit its potentiality. It has sought to identify itself with the majority of politically conscious Arabs by proclaiming its own plan for Arab unity, its adherence to the foreign policy of "positive neutralism," which bears Nasser's personal imprint, and its intention of retaining at least some of the radical economic innovations introduced by Nasser. These things are unlikely, however, to save it from conflict with the Baath socialists, and the now unorganized but probably numerous Nasserite Arab Nationalists. The Syrian regime must also fairly quickly decide how to deal with the Communists whose apparatus was harshly controlled but certainly not destroyed by Nasser and Serraj during the years of the union. In time the outcome is likely to be either an open military dictatorship which would return Syria to the instability of the times of Zaim and Shishakli, or some kind of coalition, like the uncertain one which finally gave up and appealed to Nasser for union with Egypt.

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10. Though the present Syrian regime will need friendship and support from the West, especially the US, its chances of survival would be lessened if it appeared to be drawn too close to the US or its allies. The present government will probably move further to conform to the general area sentiment favoring Arab solidarity and "positive neutralism," and successor governments are almost certain to follow this same tendency.

11. Longer Range Prospects. If immediate dangers are avoided, the breakup of the UAR could contribute to the stability of the area by influencing Nasser to concentrate his energies more upon Egypt's domestic affairs, and by encouraging the development of the principle and practice of cooperation and solidarity of sovereign states in the Arab area in place of the concept of political union. The prospects for such an outcome of the current situation cannot be rated as better than fair, but the division of Egypt and Syria probably improves them because it has the effect of imposing a more realistic assessment of Nasser's and Egypt's role in the area than has been common since the Suez crisis and the union of the two countries. Certainly any development which does contribute to the ability of the

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Arab states to cooperate is a net gain, inasmuch as those problems which are most important to them, as to the US -- area economic development, area utilization of oil resources, and rehabilitation of the Palestine refugees -- all require an area approach if progress is to be made.

FOR THE BOARD OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES:

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for SHERMAN KENT
Chairman

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MEMORANDUM FOR: General Cabell

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Mr. Dulles has asked if you would handle this one. A copy of National Security Action Memorandum No. 105 is attached. (Tab A).



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FORM NO. 101 REPLACES FORM 10-101
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October 14, 1961

NATIONAL SECURITY ACTION MEMORANDUM NO. 105

MEMORANDUM FOR: THE SECRETARY OF STATE

SUBJECT: Policy Toward Egypt and Syria

The President is greatly interested in what policy we should pursue, in the post-coup situation, toward both Egypt and the new Syrian regime. Is the at least temporary loss Nasser has sustained likely to lead him to turn his energies more inward and to create opportunities for bettering US-Egyptian relations via US development assistance?

With respect to Syria, what policy does the Department of State propose that we pursue toward the new regime? What is our estimate of its staying power? Should we undertake any special measures to encourage its apparent pro-Western tendencies or would such measures be likely to be counter-productive?

A report, and if indicated a program of action, is requested by October 20, 1961.

MCGEORGE BUNDY

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cc: The Secretary of Defense
The Secretary of the Treasury
The Director of Central Intelligence ✓

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